

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims

1. (Canceled)
2. (Currently Amended) A dilation system as recited in claim 4~~6~~, further comprising:
a second mating member formed on the interior surface of the second dilator, the second mating member being configured to engage with the first mating member when the first dilator is received within the passageway of the second dilator.
3. (Currently Amended) A dilation system as recited in claim 4~~6~~, wherein the first mating member comprises an outward projecting member or a bounded track.
4. (Original) A dilation system as recited in claim 3, wherein the outward projecting member comprises a thread, thread portion, or tang.
5. (Original) A dilation system as recited in claim 2, wherein the second mating member comprises a projecting member or a bounded track.

6. (Currently Amended) ~~A dilation system as recited in claim 4~~ A dilation system for dilating bodily tissue, the dilation system comprising:

an elongate first dilator comprising a tubular body having an exterior surface extending between a proximal end and an opposing distal insertion end, the body also having an interior surface bounding a passageway extending between the proximal end and the distal insertion end;

a first mating member formed on the exterior surface of the first dilator at the distal insertion end; and

an elongate second dilator comprising a tubular body having an exterior surface extending between a proximal end and an opposing distal insertion end, the body also having an interior surface bounding a passageway extending between the proximal end and the distal insertion end, the passageway of the second dilator being configured to receive the tubular body of the first dilator, the second dilator mechanically engaging with the first mating member such that the second dilator is forced to travel along a fixed path that prevents free rotation of the second dilator relative to the first dilator while at least a portion of the second dilator is being advanced over the first dilator, wherein the distal insertion end of the first dilator and the second dilator each terminate at a distal terminus, the second dilator mechanically disengaging from the first dilator when the distal terminus of the second dilator is at least substantially aligned with the distal terminus of the first dilator such that the second dilator is free to rotate about the first dilator.

7. (Currently Amended) A dilation system as recited in claim 46, wherein the distal insertion end of the first dilator has a tapered frustaconical configuration.

8. (Currently Amended) A dilation system as recited in claim 46, further comprising a third mating member formed on the exterior surface of the second dilator.

9. (Currently Amended) A dilation system as recited in claim 46, wherein the first dilator has a length and the second dilator has a length that is shorter than the length of the first dilator.

10. (Withdrawn) A dilation system as recited in claim 1, further comprising a retractor comprising:

a tubular body having an exterior surface extending between a proximal end and an opposing distal insertion end, the body also having an interior surface bounding a passageway extending between the proximal end and the distal insertion end, the passageway of the retractor being configured to receive the tubular body of the second dilator;

a connecting arm outwardly projecting from the body; and

at least one mating member disposed on the interior surface of the tubular body of the retractor.

11. (Cancelled)

12. (Currently Amended) A dilation system as recited in claim ~~14~~15, wherein the means for forcing the second dilator to travel along a substantially fixed path comprises:

a first mating member formed on the exterior surface of the first dilator; and

a second mating member formed on the interior surface of the second dilator, the second mating member being configured to engage with the first mating member when the first dilator is received within the passageway of the second dilator.

13. (Original) A dilation system as recited in claim 12, wherein:

the first mating member comprises at least one first thread outwardly projecting on the exterior surface of the first dilator; and

the second mating member comprises at least one tang or at least one second thread inwardly projecting from the interior surface of the second dilator.

14. (Previously Amended) A dilation system as recited in claim 12, wherein at least a portion of the exterior surface of the first dilator on which the first mating member is formed is tapered.

15. (Currently Amended) ~~A dilation system as recited in claim 11~~ A dilation system for dilating

bodily tissue, the dilation system comprising:

an elongate first dilator comprising a tubular body having an exterior surface extending between a proximal end and an opposing distal insertion end, the body also having an interior surface bounding a passageway extending between the proximal end and the distal insertion end;

an elongate second dilator comprising a tubular body having an exterior surface extending between a proximal end and an opposing distal insertion end, the body also having an interior surface bounding a passageway extending between the proximal end and the distal insertion end, the passageway of the second dilator being configured to receive the tubular body of the first dilator; and

means located at the distal insertion ends of the first and second dilators for forcing the second dilator to travel along a substantially fixed path that prevents free rotation of second dilator relative to the first dilator while at least a portion of the second dilator is being advanced over the first dilator, wherein the distal insertion end of the first dilator and the second dilator each terminate at a distal terminus, the second dilator being free to rotate about the first dilator when the distal terminus of the second dilator is at least substantially aligned with ~~or distal of~~ the distal terminus of the first dilator.

16. (Original) A dilation system as recited in claim 12, further comprising a third mating member formed on the exterior surface of the second dilator.

17. (Currently Amended) A dilation system as recited in claim ~~14~~15, wherein the first dilator has a length and the second dilator has a length that is shorter than the length of the first dilator.

18. (Currently Amended) A dilation system as recited in claim ~~14~~15, further comprising a guide wire, the passageway of the first dilator being configured to receive the guide wire.

19. (Cancelled)

20. (Currently Amended) A dilation system as recited in claim 4924, wherein the first mating member comprises a track that is at least partially bounded.

21. (Original) A dilation system as recited in claim 20, wherein the track is curved or linear.

22. (Currently Amended) A dilation system as recited in claim 4924, wherein the first mating member comprises a thread, thread portion, or tang.

23. (Cancelled)

24. (Currently Amended) ~~A dilation system as recited in claim 23~~ A dilation system for dilating bodily tissue, the dilation system comprising:

an elongate first dilator comprising a first tubular body having an exterior surface extending between a proximal end and an opposing distal insertion end, a first mating member formed on the exterior surface of the first tubular body at the distal insertion end, the first mating member terminating at a distal terminus; and

an elongate second dilator comprising a second tubular body having an interior surface and an exterior surface, the interior surface bounding a passageway extending between a proximal end and an opposing distal insertion end, the passageway of the second tubular body being configured to receive the first tubular body, a second mating member comprising a projecting tang being formed on the interior surface of the second tubular body, the second mating member engaging with the first mating member when the first dilator is received within the passageway of the second dilator, wherein the second dilator travels along a substantially fixed path relative to the first dilator as a portion of the first dilator is advanced within the passageway of the second dilator and the first mating member engages the second mating member, and wherein the second dilator freely rotates about the first dilator when the first dilator is received within the passageway of the second dilator and the second mating member is distal of at least substantially aligned with the distal terminus of the first mating member.

25. (Currently Amended) A dilation system as recited in claim 49~~24~~, further comprising an elongate third dilator comprising a third tubular body having an interior surface and an exterior surface, the interior surface bounding a passageway extending between a proximal end and an opposing distal insertion end, the passageway of the third tubular body being configured to receive the second tubular body.

26 – 38. (Canceled)

39. (Withdrawn) A retractor configured to retract bodily tissue during a surgical procedure, comprising:

a tubular body having an exterior surface extending between a proximal end and an opposing distal insertion end, the body also having an interior surface bounding a passageway extending between the proximal end and the distal insertion end; and

a clamping member outwardly projecting from the body; and

at least one mating member disposed on the interior surface of the tubular body.

40. (Withdrawn) A dilator as recited in claim 39, wherein the at least one mating member comprises at least one thread, thread portion, or tang projecting from the interior surface of the tubular body.

41. (Withdrawn) A dilator as recited in claim 39, wherein the at least one mating member comprises at least one bounded track formed the interior surface of the tubular body.

42. (Cancelled)

43. (Currently Amended) A method for dilating bodily tissue ~~as recited in claim 42~~, the method comprising:

dilating bodily tissue with a distal insertion end of a first dilator;

positioning a proximal end of the first dilator within a passageway of a tubular second dilator;

advancing the second dilator over the first dilator;

mechanically engaging the second dilator with a first mating member formed at the distal insertion end of the first dilator so as to prevent free rotation of the second dilator around the first dilator through at least a portion of the advancement;

dilating bodily tissue with a distal insertion end of the second dilator, further comprising; and

aligning a distal terminus of the second dilator with a distal terminus of the first dilator such that the second dilator mechanically disengages from the first mating member so as to enable free rotation of the second dilator around the first dilator.

44. (Currently Amended) A method for dilating bodily tissue as recited in claim ~~42~~43, further comprising advancing a third dilator over the second dilator and the first dilator.

45. (Currently Amended) A dilation system as recited in claim ~~19~~24, wherein the first mating member comprises at least one thread, and wherein the second mating member is formed at the distal insertion end of the second tubular body.